

Creating Transformative Experiences for Students in Abnormal Psychology

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One of the joys of teaching psychology is that the course content can, almost always, directly apply to the lives and experiences of individual students. The high base rate of mental disorders in the population make it likely that most students taking an Abnormal Psychology course have some pre-existing personal awareness of mental disorders. Connor-Greene (2001) described a survey of two Abnormal Psychology courses where 96% of students reported knowing at least one person with a diagnosed psychiatric disorder; the modal number of relationships with persons with a disorder was four, mostly family members. Instructors have the opportunity to build upon this intrinsic motivation to learn by creating opportunities for transformational experiences that facilitate lasting student learning and develop key intellectual skills, but they should be aware that there are also challenges to be overcome.

Chief among potential barriers to learning in an Abnormal Psychology course include pre-existing stereotypes and active stigma towards persons with mental illness. Cultural stereotypes and misconceptions abound (e.g. that Dissociative Identity Disorder and Schizophrenia are the same condition). For example, Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec (2010) concluded that although some major film releases display sympathetic portrayals of persons with mental illnesses, "many more" do not. In particular, films tend to depict persons with mental illness (especially psychosis) as unpredictable and dangerously violent. These authors also note that films commonly depict mental health professionals as either inept or arrogant and manipulative and that social stigma regarding mental illness is a major cause of relatively lower rates of help seeking by persons who would benefit from mental health treatment.

In 1999, the U.S. Surgeon General released the first report focusing on mental health (U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, 1999). Among many conclusions, the authors noted that despite advances in diagnosis and treatment, the stigma against those with mental illness remained strong, most likely due to a perceived link between violence and mental

disorders. Almost certainly, these cultural patterns and influences have shaped, to some degree, what students believe they know about mental illness.

Further, Hardy and Calhoun (1997) evaluated the impact of the "wounded healer" syndrome in abnormal psychology courses, finding that as students learn about mental disorders they become less anxious about the possibility that they, personally, have a mental disorder; unfortunately, they become *more* worried that a family member has a mental disorder, especially a personality disorder. These authors believe this may be due to a tendency by students to view themselves as "junior clinicians" and to apply nascent diagnostic skills to family members. In order to achieve transformative experiences, effective instructors carefully design their courses to focus on more than just content information regarding diagnosis, treatment, and mental disorders by creating course assignments and activities that challenge these underlying assumptions and barriers to learning; in doing so, instructors will help students gain a factual understanding of content, increase their compassion towards others and enhance students' personal commitment to learning.

Original Exercises, Assignments and Demonstrations

In order to move from an exclusive focus on content or "lecture as usual" towards transformational learning experiences, instructors need to re-evaluate their course objectives. The following are suggestions for essential course objectives for Abnormal Psychology:

- Increase students' understanding of and ability to *apply* information about mental disorders.
- Improve students' understanding and appreciation for the scientific and professional issues involved in working with individuals with mental disorders.
- Help students accept the reality of stigma, recognize its impact on the lives of people with mental disorders and their families, and their personal ethical responsibility to reduce it.

- Develop students' self-awareness as a learner and recognition of the professional value of metacognitive skills.
- Improve students' essential life skills including oral and written communication (including writing from a scientific and professional perspective).

Taken together, these course objectives are a fair match to the National Conference's definition of "psychological literacy" (see McGovern et al., 2010) within the framework of an abnormal psychology course.

Once an instructor is clear on the course objectives, class activities and course assignments will flow naturally from efforts to achieve those targets. The following are some course activities that can be helpful in achieving the noted objectives.

Student Understanding and Application of Information About Mental Illness

Make reading count by using pre-quizzes.

Doyle (2008) notes that a major reason that students do not read their text material before coming to class is that they are confident that the instructor will review the chapter material during lecture; instructors view this as saving time and effort on their part, but it can be damaging to the ability to foster active and engaged class discussions. Eliminate this problem by having students take a chapter pre-quiz *before* class discussion begins on a given topic (e.g., affective disorders). Students will come to class having already completed and thought about the readings and factual material and class time can be spent expanding, exploring, and analyzing the issues involved rather than a recitation of material that exists elsewhere. This strategy is especially effective if the pre-quiz utilizes applied or conceptual questions rather than factual questions. For example, rather than asking a factual question that asks student to identify which diagnosis involves a manic phase, a question could present a scenario of two individuals, one displaying manic behaviors, and one displaying mild dysphoria. The question then asks the student to identify which of these two persons has a stronger genetic contribution to their symptoms. The answer to such a question cannot be simply looked up in the text; it requires the students to analyze the material, recognize that there is a greater genetic contribution to Bipolar than Major Depressive disorder, and to select the best choice. Via Blackboard and other course management software, instructors can enhance the quizzes such as by allowing students to take the quizzes more than once and then averaging their scores or taking the highest one. This approach encourages them to learn from their mistakes and to correct their misunderstandings of content.

Application Workshops. Utilize case study material in collaborative team-based assignments. Every week, the class, divided into teams, spends an entire period evaluating a written case study based on material related to the current chapter. These Application Workshops begin by presenting details of the case and then asking students to respond to a set of questions that begin as mostly factual (to orient them to relevant material in the case). After responding to the questions, students then apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. The workshops increase in complexity as the semester progresses and become vaguer, requiring greater use of critical thinking by students. For instance, later case studies may actually leave out critical information requiring students to identify what crucial information is missing and ask them to evaluate how to assess for the missing information. The teamwork element of the Application Workshops can be facilitated by the use of specific roles (e.g., leader, reporter, recorder, ambassador) that team members take in turn to practice and develop new skills. These workshops increase students' depth of understanding of content material from the chapters, help them differentiate symptoms, and promote critical thinking.

Jigsaw classroom. Following the method developed by Aronson (2010), instead of lecturing on material, split the class into impromptu groups with a size appropriate to the material for that day. Give each member of the group a specific area or paradigm in which they need to develop expertise. For example, if the topic was the biopsychosocial model, one could assign one student to become expert on genetic and other biological influences (e.g., head trauma, neurotransmitters), one could be assigned expertise in stress models (e.g., diathesis-stress), one could be assigned to understand psychosocial influences, and one could be assigned to become expert in developmental and cultural factors. Once these assignments are made, introduce a case study to the class that is ambiguous (i.e., multiple etiological factors are evident and need to be explicated). All students should familiarize themselves with the case scenario. Then, split the students up whereby they each meet with an "expert" group consisting of students with the same assignment. Give students sufficient time to discuss the issues involved utilizing their texts, lecture notes, or whatever other materials are available, including organizing questions, etc. After sufficient time, split up the expert groups; students return to their original groups where they are the only real experts in their topic. Each person then shares what they have learned and the group

discusses etiology or treatment. Finish with each member of the class taking an individual quiz (this promotes interdependence on each other for vital information), or class discussion, or other integrative activity. Instructors could use this activity for both the factual knowledge objective and the objective regarding student understanding of scientific and professional issues.

Fostering Self-awareness of Stigma Against the Mentally Ill

Invite guest speakers. In most states in the country, instructors can invite pairs of trained speakers who live with mental illness, working as part of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2010) to present to the class. They share their own life stories, their recovery, carry out a planned presentation, and then answer questions from the class. This type of presentation not only makes the complexity of symptoms and diagnosis and treatment clear to students, it does so in a compelling and human way. These presenters challenge stereotypes about persons diagnosed with these disorders especially via class discussion or when reflective journals are used to ask students to reflect on this experience. Another way to maximize the impact of such a presentation might be to utilize a "what you Know, what you Want to know, and what you Learned" (KWL) exercise or other form of reflective experience, asking students to describe what they expected when they found out the speakers were coming compared with their feelings following the presentation. A principal goal here is to help students identify their own internal stereotypes and stigmas of persons with mental illness and then challenge them.

Interview Paper Assignment. By working with local mental health agencies, particularly public agencies, an instructor may be able to solicit patient volunteers willing to speak with students about their lives and experiences, including their own perspectives on diagnosis, assessment, and treatment. Care should be taken to ensure that patients are volunteering for these opportunities, but experience has demonstrated that many patients are interested in speaking to a sympathetic listener who takes an interest in their lives. Similarly, instructors should coach and advise students on how to approach these interviews, usually via class discussion and organizing questions or structure for the interview provided by the instructor. By making the interview part of a term paper, the instructor creates an opportunity for both reflection and critical thinking. Such a paper might require students to summarize the person's life (while respecting confidentiality) and to

evaluate the information the patient provides through the lens of course content. Instructors can produce transformative learning by requiring a final section of the paper, written in first person, which asks students to reflect on their own internal stigma, their feelings and apprehensions about the interview, and to evaluate the degree of match between what they feared and what actually happened. Such an assignment regularly produces significant gains in student understanding about how deep their own stereotypes and prejudices about persons with mental disorders run while giving them new information to use in combating the stigma they find around them.

Critique a Feature Film. Instructors can assign or allow students the option to write a paper evaluating a commercial film, specifically to raise their awareness of how popular media contributes to stigma. Instructors can develop a list of films that contribute to public confusion or misunderstanding of mental disorders or that promote a biased view of mental disorder (e.g. that persons with mental disorders are inherently violent and dangerous or that mental health professionals are either arrogant or incompetent). Instructors can also turn to resources such as Wedding, et al. (2010) to help construct such a list. Even popular films that portray individuals with mental disorders in a sympathetic light sometimes create confusion for the public. For example, *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, Grazer, & Howard, 2001) commonly creates confusion and misunderstanding of the differences between hallucinations and delusions and the role of electroconvulsive therapy in the treatment of psychosis; students also often miss or ignore prodromal symptoms that are evident at the beginning of the film. Asking students to critically evaluate such works both in class discussion and in written assignments can improve their awareness of stigma in culture as well as helping develop increased empathy for those with mental disorders.

Start Clicking with Students. Similar to Conner-Greene's (2001) use of an in-class survey to help students feel connected to their abnormal psychology class, instructors can utilize student response systems (SRS) or "clickers" as a way to promote student self-reflection and engagement with the material. Clickers are especially useful in abnormal psychology courses because they can collect mostly confidential input from students and provide almost immediate feedback that can help students to be more willing to confront, discuss, and evaluate issues related to stigma. For example, on the first day of class in abnormal psychology, an instructor could ask a series of questions to elicit

students' underlying myths and experiences related to mental illness such as the perception that mental illness indicates high risk for violence, the confusion between dissociative identity disorder and schizophrenia, and students' own personal experiences with diagnosis and treatment. Showing the results immediately following the question, students may help students realize that, contrary to previous beliefs that they were alone in their experiences and deserved to feel shame for their, or their family member's symptoms, a significant number of their peers may have similar experiences. This realization can be both a liberating and enlightening experience for students and can set a strong foundation for motivation to learn as well as to challenge social stigma.

Student Self-Awareness as a Learner and Mastery of Effective Learning Methods

Encouraging student meta-cognition.

Promoting students' self-awareness of their current approach to learning and encouraging them to actively adopt a deep approach to learning by utilizing effective study strategies is an integrative approach in abnormal psychology because it links directly to other course objectives. One cannot truly understand the way a psychologist thinks and evaluates information unless one understands the role of lifelong learning and the need to constantly and effectively update one's knowledge base through ongoing study. Further, the use of psychological inventories for these purposes can be linked to discussions of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning. Several tools exist that can facilitate student development in these areas.

The first tool is the Revised Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ; Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001), an instrument that provides feedback to students on the degree to which they are approaching learning from a surface or a deep approach. Assign students to complete the R-SPQ early in the semester, quickly check their scoring, and then provide them with norms based on class means and standard deviations and a document to assist students in evaluating their results. This exercise is more effective when instructors ask students to submit a reflection paper about their scores, considering the class norms, discuss a possible "treatment plan" they could use to enhance their own learning, and then reflect on how this process mirrors that used by psychologists with patients. Because this assignment directly involves a student's personal experience with an assessment tool, class discussions can emphasize issues of reliability, validity, diagnosis, and treatment planning using the R-SPQ as an example. Class discussions could also focus on students' perceptions

of the relative merits of seeking treatment from a professional psychologist who utilized a deep approach to learning throughout their training versus one who adopted a surface approach. Consistent with Doyle's (2008) observations about motivating and engaging students, such a discussion establishes the links between the students' own experiences, learning goals, and the value of the assignment to their future lives and careers.

Instructors can utilize another set of instruments to emphasize different aspects of learning effectiveness. Grounded in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM; Prochaska & Norcross, 2009), the TTM Learning Survey (Tolman, Tully, & York, 2009; Tolman, Biggs, & Binks, 2010) asks students to evaluate their readiness to adopt more effective learning strategies, both for solo learning and for working in learning groups. Although the TTM Learning Survey is a new instrument, results from over 700 students from a wide variety of undergraduate classes (both upper and lower division) suggest that it has promise in assessing readiness to adopt effective learning strategies. Tolman, et al. (2010) also described using the TTM Learning Survey in conjunction with a related set of instruments called the Learning Strategies Self-Assessment (LSSA; Tolman, et al., 2010) that utilize both quantitative and qualitative questions to ask students to report and reflect on the frequency of use of well-known effective learning strategies and their own learning goals. As with the R-SPQ, class discussions of these instruments should be embedded within a context specific to abnormal psychology; for example, the TTM Learning Survey is an attitudinal scale whereas the LSSA is a behavioral scale (the quantitative section), and the LSSA demonstrates the value of both quantitative and qualitative measurement. Similarly to the R-SPQ, an assignment asking students to reflect on the meaning their scores and to link their experiences to clinical processes can give them an experiential basis for understanding some issues related to the processes of assessment and diagnosis. Last, because the TTM Learning Survey is grounded in a clinical theory about change and how individuals respond to treatment differentially, there are natural links that could be exploited, particularly when discussing psychotherapy and the treatment of substance disorders, the original field in which the TTM theory was developed (e.g. Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Because students will have already considered the issues of readiness to change and their application, this discussion should be more fruitful and personal to them.

Development of Essential Life and Professional Skills

Application workshops as a platform for building communication and team skills.

Application Workshops should also be utilized to assist students in improving their ability to work in teams. Class discussions introducing the workshop assignment should emphasize that learning how to work effectively with others from different backgrounds is a general core professional skill, with special utility in clinical or hospital settings. Even private practitioners work in teams with their administrative staff, referral sources, courts, and others. The instructor should explicitly connect the learning value of teamwork to value offered to patients (e.g. multi-method input and assessment and diagnostic information from a variety of sources tends to produce more accurate diagnoses and can lead to more effective treatment). One way to enhance the effectiveness of the Application Workshops is to ask students in their teams to adopt specific roles such as Team Leader (responsible for getting the assignment done on time), Recorder (summarizes the team's conclusions on the page that will be turned in to the instructor), Reporter (provides a verbal summary of the team's conclusions during the class debriefing), and Ambassador (brings questions from the team to the instructor and conveys answers back to the Team). Requiring students to rotate through these team roles with each workshop not only keeps the students actively involved in the discussions and prevents social loafing, it allows them opportunities to develop skills essential to professional success.

Annotated Bibliography

Student Understanding and Application of Information about Mental Illness

Experiential demonstration of symptoms of dissociative identity disorder. Describes a classroom demonstration that generates temporary symptoms of multiple personality in student volunteers - a very engaged activity. Grounding the classroom experiment in a contextual discussion of differential diagnosis, various theories about the etiology of the condition (including the iatrogenic hypothesis), the use of hypnosis in these cases, and the real-world context of the Kenneth Bianchi (Hillside Strangler) case, the instructor solicits student volunteers from those with elevated scores on a measure of suggestibility and interviews them in class using hypnotic techniques after preparing them to role-play an accused murderer. The author notes that this demonstration should only be performed by persons experienced with hypnosis because it is

possible that some students could become hypnotized during the session. Debriefing is very important to ensure that students understand the various controversies surrounding the diagnosis and can develop an informed opinion.

- Rabinowitz, F. E. (2000). Creating multiple personality: An experiential demonstration for an undergraduate abnormal psychology course. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 52-55). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Demonstrating symptoms of schizophrenia. In this activity, the instructor engages in the use of an apparently spontaneous monologue reflective of the disordered thought processes in schizophrenia. (The monologue is actually planned in advance). Following the monologue, the instructor asks students to explain their emotional reactions, describe their thoughts during the monologue, and clarifies diagnostic issues (such as the distinction between schizophrenia and multiple personalities). The instructor also promotes discussion of the potential symbolic meaning of delusional material, the person's emotional reactions to their own symptoms, and the reactions of others to the symptoms. This exercise provides not only an opportunity for improving student comprehension of schizophrenia, but a chance to address issues of stigma and the social treatment of persons with psychotic conditions.

- Osberg, T. M. (2000). The disordered monologue: A classroom demonstration of the symptoms of schizophrenia. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp.55-57). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Understanding mental illness through poetry.

Describes a written assignment to promote student understanding of mental illness as well as to increase student empathy towards those who are affected. The author asks students to write a poem about "the experience of mental illness" (p.73) without restrictions on subject, length, or perspective (first- and second-person perspectives are permitted). She notes that although they often appear initially shocked by the assignment, most students end up producing high quality work. Chrisler also states that grading criteria for the assignment include that the poem must convey a solid understanding of the symptoms of a specific disorder or general psychiatric state (e.g. anxiety) as it would be experienced by a person.

- Chrisler, J. C. (2000a). Exploring mental illness through a poetry-writing assignment. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of*

Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 73-74). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Increasing understanding of suicide and risk factors. As the authors note, suicide is an important topic in abnormal psychology and often does not receive sufficient attention in texts. In conjunction with lectures related to depression and suicide, the authors ask students to complete the Revised Facts on Suicide Quiz (RFOS). They also provide students with a list of resources related to suicide prevention and discuss warning signs that students should watch for. After the quiz is scored, the instructor leads a discussion of the items that were missed by significant percentages of the class. They note that students have also expressed that the quiz is useful as a study guide or handout. By identifying those areas in which students have misunderstandings or misconceptions regarding suicide, the instructor has the opportunity to provide updated information and to foster improved understanding of this important topic.

- Hubbard, R. W., & McIntosh, J. L. (2000). Integrating suicidology into abnormal psychology classes: The Revised Facts on Suicide Quiz. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 84-87). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Demonstration of in vivo participant modeling. As part of a class unit helping students understand behavioral treatment modalities, the author utilized a wildlife expert as a guest speaker. This exercise would also be very useful in a discussion regarding anxiety disorders. Approximately one week prior to the guest's visit, the instructor asked students to complete a questionnaire related to fear of snakes. Subsequently, the guest speaker brought with him a live non-poisonous snake to class and described snakes. He brought the snake out to show the class; those students who had indicated they were fearful of snakes were asked to approach and interact with the snake in a systematic way, following behavioral principles and modeling by the guest. Results of a post-activity survey found that students generally found the activity interesting and helpful. The instructor reported that this exercise is most helpful if accompanied by class discussion about the difficulty in identifying the change mechanisms involved in helping the fearful students interact with the snake, and whether or not the results are generalizable. Because the instructor's husband was the expert model, others may find this activity more difficult to implement, but she suggests approaching colleagues in a Biology department,

contacting local zoos, nature centers or pet stores for potential partners in this activity. As an alternative, the DVD accompanying Durand and Barlow's (2010) abnormal psychology text contains many useful short videos, one of which demonstrates the use of *in vivo* exposure to treat a snake phobia.

- Hughes, D. (2000). Participant modeling as a classroom activity. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 141-143). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Demonstration of in vivo systematic desensitization. Noting that teaching students about systematic desensitization can be difficult to do *in vivo*, due to the repeated nature of sessions over time, the authors describe an in-class demonstration that is humorous and gains student attention. Prior to the class where the demonstration will be used, the instructor approached a student who typically sat at the back of the classroom and asked them to participate. The instructor then told the class that he had been working with the student who had an eraser phobia and thus avoided sitting near the front of the class. The steps of systematic desensitization were demonstrated with gradually increasing exposure to the feared eraser. The authors found that students generally reacted positively to the demonstration and reported that it was helpful to them in understanding the principles involved. They note the importance of grounding the demonstration in a discussion of the nature of anxiety disorders, the complexity involved in real-world desensitization treatment, and the related ethical principles involved (e.g., instructors do not conduct therapy with their students due to dual roles). They also describe some variations on the demonstration that might make it more effective. In addition to those described, instructors could involve students in helping to elaborate the steps of the hierarchy, which would engage them more actively in thinking through the method.

- Lawson, T. J., & Redrawn, M. (2000). A humorous demonstration of *in vivo* systematic desensitization: The case of eraser phobia. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 143-145). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Student Understanding of Scientific and Professional Issues

Illustrating the role of paradigms in the etiology of mental disorders. In order to assist students in comprehending the role that paradigms play in understanding the etiology of mental disorders and the selection of treatment modalities, the author presented students with an ambiguous case

study. She asks the students to explain the etiological issues that lead to the client's problems and to describe what treatment they would suggest. (Such an activity could be easily incorporated into an Application Workshop assignment as described above and might have more impact due to the more intensive small-group interactions). After eliciting student input on the questions, the instructor asked the students to classify their answers according to the major paradigms used in the course (e.g., psychological, social, etc.). Most useful, she asked the students to then evaluate why some paradigms were avoided, for example, the possibility that the client's behaviors were due to organic causes. She also asked the students to evaluate whether or not the causes they ascribed to the patient's behaviors matched up with the treatment modalities they recommended. She also pointed out to students that they did not suggest etiological factors that were historical (e.g., the symptoms were due to demonic possession) and asks them to discuss the meaning of this fact. This class discussion makes the exercise quite useful, especially if similar exercises were to be repeated across the semester.

- Morahan-Martin, J. (2008). Paradigms on the etiology and treatment of abnormal behavior. In L. T. Benjamin (Ed). *Favorite Activities for the Teaching of Psychology* (pp. 215-217). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Developing students' ability to form effective questions. To encourage the development of students' questioning (and thus critical thinking skills) the instructors integrated readings from a supplemental text by Keeley (1995) into their Abnormal Psychology course plan. They also utilized reading assignments for every text chapter, asking students to develop questions in such areas as the underlying questions being *answered* by the text, the theories or approaches being utilized, and making use of sentence stems as a scaffolding technique to encourage student development of evaluative questions. The instructor also provided specific instruction and feedback to students on how to generate effective questions. This exercise would be most useful in abnormal psychology if instructors explicitly linked and discussed with students the role of effective questions in research involving psychopathology, clinical assessment, treatment outcome evaluation, and real-life evaluation of controversial issues facing the field (e.g. the effectiveness of antidepressant medications).

- Keeley, S. M., Ali, R., & Gebing, T. (1998). Beyond the sponge model: Encouraging students questioning skills in Abnormal Psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 25(4), 270-274.

Understanding theoretical perspectives through the use of literary case studies. Describes an approach to help students understand the connection between theory and empirical data. The instructor employs a writing assignment where students select a figure from history, the arts, or current events and analyze that individual's behaviors utilizing a single theoretical perspective from the mental health field (e.g., psychoanalysis, medical model, behaviorism) based on biographical data and to recommend a treatment plan consistent with the theory utilized. He notes that such an assignment is difficult for students and recommends using a draft with revision. He notes this assignment is useful in helping students realize that any single perspective is inadequate to understand the complexity of human behavior and that different theories may have utility in different areas (e.g. to understand the etiology of behaviors, but not necessarily to treat them).

- Perkins, D. V. (2000). A case-study assignment to teach theoretical perspectives in abnormal psychology. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 64-65). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

A collaborative approach to analyzing case studies. Another approach to helping students understand the use of paradigms in abnormal psychology utilized collaborative teams. The authors described a case-conference method in which each team was assigned to become expert in a particular paradigm in psychopathology (e.g. cognitive, psychodynamic). Subsequently, each team was asked to analyze the same case study; the authors provided sufficient historical information to enable students to utilize the paradigm they had studied. Each team was asked to respond to four guiding questions that focused on problem identification, etiology, recommended treatments, and assessment of outcomes. During class discussion each team presented their findings and identified disagreements or conflicts with the previous paradigms, similar to a clinical case conference where professionals of different background present their view and perspectives on the patient. The authors presented preliminary data suggesting that this approach resulted in improvement of students' understanding of these major paradigms and recognition of how theory shapes the interpretation of patient data and professional conclusions. Such an exercise could potentially be even more effective if instructors asked students to integrate the findings or to reach a class-wide resolution on how to proceed with the patient, similar to real-world practice. Such an extension of the exercise could help students understand the

dilemmas facing clinical teams who must not only analyze clinical realities, but respond to them.

- Lafosse, J. M., & Zinser, M. C. (2002). A case-conference exercise to facilitate understanding of paradigms in abnormal psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 29(3), 220-222.

An unconventional approach to teaching paradigms. Explaining that most texts in abnormal psychology focus on a small set of theoretical perspectives or paradigms, the author describes another approach to helping students understand the role and impact of theory. He does this by asking students to read a book and then write a term paper in which they evaluate an "unconventional" perspective such as the anti-psychiatry position, labeling and role theories, feminist theory, etc. The assignment requires students to evaluate the soundness of evidence marshaled by the author, how well the author deals with opposing points of view and to give their own conclusion. He also permits two drafts of this paper which allows students to learn from feedback, a process he indicates usually results in improved understanding of historical context, better critical thinking, and a broader understanding of the multiple ways to view human experience. This exercise has the benefit of expanding student awareness of alternative, non-mainstream critiques of the field as well as promoting scientific skepticism and critical thinking.

- Anderson, D. D. (2000). Questioning the conventional wisdom and critiquing unconventional perspectives in abnormal psychology: A written exercise. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp.71-73). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Fostering Self-awareness of Stigma Against the Mentally Ill

Utilizing literary case studies to promote student empathy and writing skills. Although she utilizes similar materials to some others described above, one instructor focuses on a different target - understanding and developing empathy for persons who struggle with mental disorders as well as improvement in student writing skills. She advocates the use of literary works focusing on characters with various types of mental disorders as case-study material to achieve these ends. In her assignment, she asks students to select a book from a list of novels, biographies, and autobiographies and to write a paper using a set of organizing questions focusing on key aspects of diagnosis and treatment. She notes that because many of the books are older, they do not fit well with current diagnostic systems and require

students to think more broadly. She notes that the assignment gives students a better understanding of the impact of these disorders on someone's life beyond what is found in textbooks and that the assignment promotes increased empathy, possibly because characters in novels may be more vividly and sympathetically drawn than those typically utilized in case-study materials.

- Chrisler, J. C. (2000b). Novels as case-study materials for psychology students. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 69-70). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Building empathy via experiential learning with disabilities. Describes a set of strategies for providing students with the experience of a temporary disability through the use of equipment to simulate a disability for a day (e.g. a visual or auditory or motor disability), or in-class activities that simulate the emotional impact of childhood disorders or learning disabilities. They also utilized guest speakers who would be willing to share their experiences (e.g., a family member whose relative committed suicide). Many of these activities involved the use of specialized equipment or methods that might be difficult to duplicate, but the authors indicated that they worked with their institution's student affairs division and accessibility or disability services for assistance. Equipment such as this might also be obtained through the use of internal or external funding grants. These authors noted students expressed an increased sense of frustration, awkwardness, and isolation during the simulations and activities and described being more socially isolated by others. By the conclusion of the activity, most participants indicated increased sense of empathy and compassion for those with disabilities.

- Wurst, S. A., & Wolford, K. (2000). Integrating disability awareness into psychology courses: Applications in abnormal psychology and perception. In M. E. Ware & D. E. Johnson (Eds). *Handbook of Demonstrations and Activities in the Teaching of Psychology* (2nd Ed, Vol. 3, pp. 89-91). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Development of essential life and professional skills

Promoting writing skills while building content knowledge. Focusing a class assignment on building student writing skills, a lifelong and professional core intellectual skill, an instructor can nevertheless also help students understand content. The author used formative feedback and paper revisions to promote student improvement in writing while emphasizing the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic

approaches to psychopathology. She asked students to complete two writing assignments, one focusing on analysis of a case study chosen from a list of books by the student, and one focusing on a research proposal based on a set of published articles. The research article assignment emphasized use of APA format whereas the case-study paper was a reaction paper. She discussed the reports in class and scheduled individual appointment with students to discuss their research proposals. She also provided detailed feedback to students on their first draft of each assignment and allowed revisions. She noted that students reported that the assignments were useful, but they found the research proposal assignment more effective overall in developing their interest in the field of psychology.

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Concluding Remarks

Given the importance of the overall goal of developing "psychologically literate citizens" (McGovern et al., 2010) as the core of undergraduate education in psychology and the critical nature of developing students' core intellectual and practical skills (e.g., oral and written communication, quantitative reasoning, etc.) for future success in graduate studies, I was somewhat dismayed at how relatively little literature exists on developing these types of course objectives in abnormal psychology. Further, there was very little evidence of studies focusing on promoting meta-cognition of student learning approaches and relatively little on combating stigma. Articles addressing these issues do exist in the teaching of psychology literature and in the general pedagogical literature, but it would be very helpful to find more specific examples or suggestions of how to address these course objectives in specific classes like abnormal psychology.

Every psychologist teaching at an undergraduate or high school level might benefit from careful study of the proposed core principles at the heart of undergraduate education in psychology (Halpern, 2010) and seek to develop, and share, their experiences and knowledge.

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